Waltham Abbey Panelled Room, Essex

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The Waltham Abbey panelling is a fascinating and little-studied example of early sixteenth-century woodwork. Previous antiquarian approaches have attempted to identify the patron and original location, but failed to place the panelling's iconography and style into the broader context of sixteenth-century England. This article re-evaluates the panelling in the light of fresh research and extensive observation, offering new possibilities about its origins, location and creation. Fifty-four of 110 carved oak panels are displayed at Epping Forest District Museum, Essex, on long-term loan from the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A). A group of 100 narrow panels dates to the c.1520s, carved by several hands of varying abilities, possibly with one or more foreigners working alongside native craftsmen. A second group of ten wider panels is dissimilar in design and style, suggesting a different, perhaps Continental hand. Despite two unidentified coats of arms, the panels' original location is unknown. Probably made for Waltham Abbey itself, they may have adorned the Abbey Mansion before moving to 'Green Yard', a house in the town. They could also have been made for Dallance, a nearby manor. The combination of Renaissance medallion portraits, Tudor heraldic devices and Gothic ogee arches shows craftsmen adapting new Continental motifs for the English context.

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps only a few hundred metres from the site it first adorned, the early sixteenth-century Waltham Abbey panelling is now displayed at Epping Forest District Museum, Essex (henceforth EFDM) on long-term loan from London's Victoria and Albert Museum. Fifty-four of the 110 oak panels acquired by the V&A in 1899 have recently been redisplayed in Essex (Pl. 1); a further panel is in the British Galleries in the V&A, and the others are in store.[2] Despite the panelling's intriguing history and unusual iconography, since Harold Clifford Smith's book of 1924 only a few local historians have studied this fascinating object.[3]

The town of Waltham Abbey (formerly Waltham Holy Cross) lies in the River Lea valley in south-west Essex, twelve miles north-east of London. The abbey after which the town is named was founded in the twelfth century, and in 1540 was the last to be dissolved in England. According to tradition, it was in the abbey's 'Romeland' that Henry VIII first discussed divorcing Katherine of Aragon, and in nearby Epping Forest, nine years later, he waited to hear the gun signalling Anne Boleyn's execution.[4] Following the dissolution the abbey nave remained in use as the parish church, but the rest of the site was acquired by the Denny family in 1542. The V&A removed the Waltham Abbey panelling from a house in 'Green Yard' in the town in 1899. Probably not original to 'Green Yard' it may once have adorned the house built by Edward Denny on the abbey site around 1599,[5] although was almost certainly made for an older property. Beyond this, despite two carved coats of arms, nothing certain has been established about the identity of the patron, the nationality of the carvers, or the panels' original location. The most frequently cited suggestion is that they were made for an Abbot of Waltham Abbey before its dissolution. Where past investigations have taken a more localised, antiquarian approach, discussing the panelling's origins and heraldry, this essay places its iconography and style into the broader context of early sixteenth-century England.

The Waltham Abbey panelling sits at a junction between the native and Renaissance styles, made when 'romayne' and 'all'antica' forms, already popular in Europe, were being absorbed into the English decorative repertoire. Each panel is approximately 63.4cm × 19.5cm × 1cm. At present the panels on display at EFDM are framed with scratch-moulded rails and edge-moulded stiles in three tiers, to a height of roughly 2.2m.[6] The panels can be removed from their framing, however, and the current arrangement may not reflect their original presentation. The panels can be divided into two primary groups. Firstly, a set of ten, high-quality, squarer panels, carved in deeper relief and showing a high level of skill in execution (Pls 7–8), all in store. These panels each have a single,

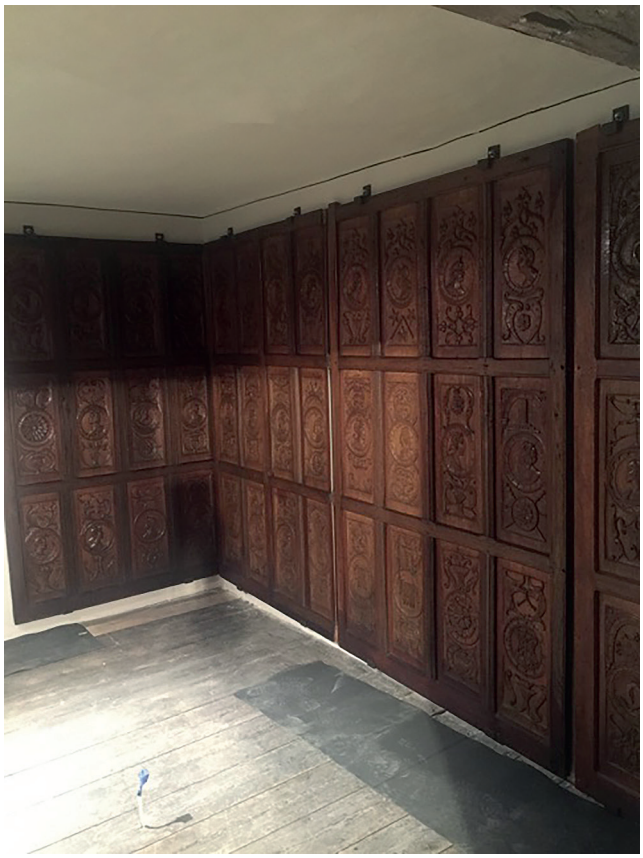

PLATE 1: General view of new display (from 2016) of Waltham Abbey Panelled Room, at Epping Forest District Museum, Essex.

central motif taking up most of the space, either an elaborate vase with some perspectival effects, or a wreath containing a portrait in profile. The second group of 100 narrower panels is of more varied quality. These panels are carved with three motifs; a central medallion and supporting motifs above and below. The medallions contain either a profile portrait or heraldic device—sometimes a coat of arms, sometimes a royal badge—a Tudor rose, portcullis or pomegranate. The supporting motifs are very varied, with 'antique' forms including grotesque dolphins, vases, scrolls, and trophies, and others more clearly derived from the native Gothic tradition, such as a green man, ogee arches and an oak branch. The panels are also carved with grotesque faces, bunches of grapes and other motifs of obscure origin.

The style and shape of the panelling suggests a date early in Henry VIII's reign; the long and narrow proportions of the main group were fashionable before the mid-sixteenth century, when panels became broader and shorter,[7] and the Aragonese pomegranates suggest they were carved between Henry VIII's marriage to Katherine of Aragon in 1509 and their divorce in 1533. This date range coincides with the period when Renaissance decorative idioms were beginning to appear in England. Little has been written about the early English Renaissance, although recent studies have explored contemporary links with Florence and Northern Europe, and investigations of other medallion-panel schemes have started to bring similar work into mainstream scholarship.[8] The medallion portrait was relatively common in England in this period, but the curious combination of antique medallions with Tudor heraldic devices and Gothic motifs is extremely rare, and testament to the versatility of the carvers in adapting foreign ideas for the English market. This article reassesses the patronage and heraldry debates, and offers a new possibility for the panels' original location. It explores the potential meanings and sources of the motifs, their relationship to the different styles of carving and the wider cultural context.

ORIGINS

Location

The first confirmed reference to the Waltham Abbey panelling is in Edward Littler's 1863 'Plan of Town of Waltham Abbey'. 'Green Yard', home to the panels before 1899, is described in the key as 'House containing carved panels brought from the House which Stood in the Abbey Gardens and was built out of the ruins of the Abbey'.[9] The house in the abbey gardens was the Abbey Mansion, owned by Charles Wake Jones in the eighteenth century and pulled down in 1770.[10] Though much altered, this was ostensibly the same property built *c.*1599 by Edward Denny, from reclaimed materials on the site acquired in 1542 by his grandfather, Anthony Denny. Though a newspaper account of the demolition from 1770 makes no reference to the panelling, the most probable scenario is that the panels were transferred from Abbey Mansion to Green Yard, although other origins have been suggested, including that they were originally made for Green Yard and never installed elsewhere.[11]

Prior to 1863 there are two known descriptions of wainscoting (panelling) in the vicinity of the town. The first is in the 1540 *Inventory of the Abbey,* where wainscot is included in valuations of several rooms' contents:[12] wall panelling would have been considered a moveable furnishing and part of the abbey's saleable goods. On three occasions the inventory lists 'a portall of wainscott', where 'wainscott' probably indicates the type of wood used for the door—'wainscot' oak, imported from Germany and elsewhere for its strength and straightness—rather than panels lining a room.[13] However, 'the grete hall' is described as 'siled about with wainescott'. Wainscoting is also mentioned in 'The Abbots utter Parlor': 'And the same parlor siled with wainescotte', and in 'The Stone Parlor/Item the same siled aboute with/wainescott', although without further description we cannot be certain that this is the panelling now at EFDM.[14]

The second account is in John Farmer's 1735 history of Waltham Abbey. He describes the 'sumptuous Hall' of the Wake Jones' Abbey Mansion: 'in Length it contains sixteen Yards and an half, and in Breadth eight Yards and an half; in Height nine Yards one Foot. It is exceeding handsome, by reason of the Wainscotting and extraordinary Painting...'.[15] Rhona Huggins, author of an unpublished study of the panelling, has suggested that the paintings hung above the panelling, with the wainscoting reaching to approximately 7ft (2.13m).[16] Taking the dimensions of the hall from Farmer, and using the present panelling's 2.2m as a guide height, the total surface area that might have been covered by wainscoting in 1735 is approximately 83m^2. Compared to the estimated 26m2 of all 110 surviving panels (assuming that the panels in store roughly match those at Epping Forest in size) it is clear that the Waltham Abbey panelling in its current state would not cover the wall surface of the hall described by Farmer. However, some panels may have been lost since 1735, and it is probable that the medallion panels were originally matched with less elaborate linenfold panels, as for example at Thame Park in Oxfordshire,[17] Tolleshunt D'Arcy Hall in Essex, and formerly at Boughton Malherbe, Kent.[18] In these examples medallion panels sit above, or amongst, linenfold panels, but in S H Grimm's 1782 drawing of Halnaker in Sussex the decorated panels are concentrated at one end of a room, with the other walls panelled in linenfold.[19] These precedents for combining elaborate carvings with simpler panels that later generations might have discarded—especially if moving to a smaller house, as with Green Yard—suggest that, despite the dimensions, the panels could have decorated the Abbey Mansion's hall.

Patronage

If Farmer saw the panelling in the Abbey Mansion, it had probably been installed there over a century earlier, when Edward Denny built the house around 1599. Edward was the grandson of Sir Anthony Denny, privy councillor to Henry VIII and keeper of the abbey property from 1542, obtaining the grant in fee in 1547.[20] According to Thomas Fuller, writing in the seventeenth century, one Thomas Smith recalled 'serv[ing] Sir Edward Denny (towards the latter end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, of blessed memory), who lived in the Abbey of Waltham-Crosse, in the County of Essex, which at that time lay in ruinous heaps, and then Sir Edward began slowly, now and then, to make even, and re-edify some of that chaos'.[21] As Rhona Huggins suggests, Anthony Denny must have retained the materials and even some of the abbey buildings when he became keeper of the site, possibly accommodating the King and Queen there when they hunted in Waltham Forest.[22] Certainly the buildings cannot have been fully redeveloped by

the end of the sixteenth century if Smith remembered 'that chaos'. We can trace a plausible sequence of ownership for the panels; made for an abbot, they could have been left *in situ* when Denny bought the property, then moved to the new Abbey House built by his grandson in 1599, where they were later seen by Farmer, and finally Green Yard.

The most plausible patron for the panels is therefore an abbot of Waltham Abbey. Ecclesiastical ownership of medallion-head panelling was not unusual. At Thame Park in Oxfordshire the Abbot of Thame commissioned a combination of linenfold and medallion panels for the Abbot's Parlour,[23] and Abbot Rugge ordered the panelling now in Norwich Cathedral vestry, either for his Abbey of St Benet's before the 1536 dissolution, or afterwards for his episcopal palace when he became bishop.[24] Although largely secular in iconography, the Waltham Abbey panelling may originally have belonged to the abbey. Abbots were worldly men: often entangled in the politics of the court, they were also susceptible to its fashions. In addition, the inclusion of Eucharistic grapes on the panels, and instances of a Eucharistic chalice and a Calvary cross, may suggest an ecclesiastical patron.

Heraldry

The use of heraldic devices to signify individuals and families had been developing since the mid-twelfth century, originating in the need for identification on the battlefield.[25] Though never an exact science, heraldry acquired hereditary qualities and spread to other spheres of display; motifs and colours could be used to indicate blood ties and allegiances in costume, buildings and moveable possessions, visually representing the owner's 'pedigree'.[26] Perhaps galvanised by the Tudor dynasty's anxiety to demonstrate its royal status, the early sixteenth century witnessed increasing interest in lineage and dynastic standing. As well as demonstrating an owner's pedigree, heraldry could indicate endorsement or patronage, advertising the owner's authority and generosity as well as nobility.

Heraldry's ability to communicate identity without written explanation depended on the viewer recognising the devices; this knowledge has long been lost with regard to the Waltham panelling. Two coats of arms, as yet unidentified, feature on nine panels. They may represent the owner or patron of the panelling, or if made for the abbey, an abbey benefactor. One shows a chevron between three mullets [five-pointed stars] (Pl. 2) and appears four times as a supporter on shield escutcheon, once without escutcheon. On four other panels, another coat of arms occupies the central medallion: also on shield escutcheon, quarter 1,4, a chevron between 3 pierced mullets; 2,3, a lion rampant with a bend to the sinister overall (Pl. 3). Several different owners have been suggested for the arms, but without the tinctures firm identification may never be possible.

In 1910, the antiquarian Reverend H.L.L. Denny suggested the panels were carved for Sir Anthony's family, the Dennys of Cheshunt, but mistakenly used the coat of another family, the Dennys of Suffolk.[27] As such, he dated the panels to after the mid-sixteenth century, when the Dennys reached Waltham Abbey.[28] Yet the visual evidence contradicts these arguments. The arms of the Cheshunt Dennys don't match those on the panels as H.L.L. Denny claimed.[29] Moreover, the inclusion of Aragonese pomegranates (Pl. 6) suggests that the panels date from before the 1533 divorce. By the 1550s, when the family came to Waltham, panels had become squarer in shape, and

PLATE 2: Panel with coat of arms, Tudor Rose and full-face grotesque with tassel.

PLATE 3: Panel with ogee arch and grapevine, quartered coat of arms, and grotesque fish with split-diamond scale decoration and tassel.

medallion heads and Christian motifs such as grapes and Eucharistic chalices were unfashionable.[30] Finally, work on the room would have been careful and expensive; even if the craftsman confused the heraldry, it is implausible that the patrons did not demand the mistake's correction.[31] H.L.L. Denny also suggests that the panels could have been made earlier for the family house in Cheshunt and brought to Waltham Abbey later, but this is improbable. Harold Clifford Smith, former Keeper of the Department of Woodwork at the V&A and author of the 1924 book on the panelling, identifies the 'plain Calvary cross (with its arms broken off) rising from a base of three steps' with the Holy Cross of Waltham

PLATE 4: Panel with full-face grotesque with tassel, quartered coat of arms, and scroll decoration.

(Pl. 5), perhaps indicating an origin near Waltham Abbey.[32] The evidence suggests that the Dennys did not commission the panelling, either for the Abbey Mansion or at Cheshunt.

Another possibility is that the panels were made for a previous owner of the nearby house called 'Dallance'. This manor, one mile north-east of Waltham Abbey, was owned by Sir Humphrey Browne in the early sixteenth century. From Browne it passed via Henry VIII to the Denny family, who acquired it with the abbey lands after the dissolution in 1540.[33] Dallance was the local manor before Abbey House was built, and the fact that the Dennys subsequently owned both suggests a means for the panelling to have come from Dallance to Abbey House, and ultimately to Green Yard. Sir Humphrey's arms have little in common with those on the panelling, however,[34] though this origin would explain the possible inclusion of the Waltham Abbey Cross and other religious motifs, both being in the vicinity of a major centre of pilgrimage.

PLATE 5: Panel with Calvary cross on three steps (Waltham Holy Cross?) now missing crossbar, portrait medallion of woman facing left, and achievement of weapons.

To date, the best guess for the heraldry's owner—Abbot Robert Fuller—has been most fully developed by Rhona Huggins, a local historian, in an unpublished study of the Waltham Abbey panelling.[35] She identifies the chevron between three estoiles as representing Walsingham and Waltham, arguing that the arms on the panels represent 'those of a married man quartering his wife's': a heraldic joke, with Fuller's arms 'wedded' to his abbey's. She sees the playful 'jester faces' on the panelling (*e.g.* Pls 2, 5) as a pun on Fuller's name (fool/Fuller), and the fact that they sometimes occur with tassels as a further pun on a fuller's 'teazle'.[36] The puns relating to Fuller's name are debatable; the motifs could simply be generic grotesque carving, without obvious additional significance, and some have spoons or ropes rather than tassels. Additionally, the arms may not represent the correct Waltham, as Thomas Fuller gives different arms for Waltham Abbey, and there is no evidence that Abbot Fuller had arms with a rampant lion and bend sinister.[37] Without a firm identification of the heraldry the question of patronage remains open, but the association with Fuller fits both the tradition that the panels came from the abbey and the *c.* 1520s date. The panels could also have been made for one of Fuller's predecessors: John Shernbroke (abbot 1507–1514) and John Malyn (abbot 1514–1527), about whom little is known.[38] Clifford Smith states that the panelling may have been made 'for a secular house' in the town, or for an abbey building, in which case the arms may be those of an abbey benefactor, and not necessarily one 'in the immediate neighbourhood'.[39] The most plausible solution is that the panels were originally made

for the abbey, and decorated with the arms of an unidentified benefactor.

STYLE

Nothing is known about the craftsmen who carved the Waltham Abbey panels—their nationality, their number, how they worked or who directed them. Little is known generally about workshop practices behind this kind of object, and a complete lack of documentary evidence in this case means only tentative conclusions may be drawn from visual evidence. The most secure stylistic distinction can be made between two primary groups of panels: the group of ten, high-quality, squarer panels with a single central figure, and a group of 100 narrower panels with central medallions between supporting motifs. In the latter set it is possible loosely to identify further groups of hands of varying quality. Previous scholars have suggested an accomplished Northern European craftsman was working alongside a group of less skilled, perhaps native carvers. The employment of foreign carvers on this sort of work is illustrated by the example of Queen's College, Cambridge; in 1531 Giles Fambeler and Dyrik Harrison were employed to carve medallion head and heraldic panels—craftsmen whose names sound foreign, possibly Flemish.[40] However, the identification of the carvers' hands is complicated by the possibility that different craftsmen carved the portrait medallion and supporters on the same panel.

The first group of ten panels is clearly higher quality, and uses motifs absent from narrower panels. Six have vases with arabesques and scrolls (Pl. 7), while the other four have profile heads in circular wreaths (Pl. 8). Clifford Smith suggests that these were drawn from Italian or Franco-Italian sources.[41] Although no directly comparable prints have been found, engravings such as the wreathed medallion profile of Julia Pia from North East Italy of *c.* 1480, or a design for a panel by the Dutch engraver Lucas van Leyden (with antique supporters and helmeted portrait) dated 1527 may represent the kinds of sources on which the designers drew.[42] The panels are carved in deep relief; they are vigorous, confident and use perspectival effects—for example, in Pl. 7 the corner of the vase's square base points towards the viewer, the sides receding to give a three-dimensional impression. This effect is not attempted on any other panel, especially not on the group of 100 narrow panels, where the 'vases' look two-dimensional though carved in relief. The group of ten is closely symmetrical along the vertical axis and simple in composition. Although more elaborate than the narrower panels, the carvings form a single central motif. This is true of the medallion heads in the group as well as the vases; the roundels are embellished with ribbons but these are tied to the wreaths. In contrast, the narrow panels are divided into three distinct sections; a central medallion and upper and lower supporting devices.

The holistic compositions of this group of ten panels, their high-quality execution and assured use of motifs, suggests they are by a different craftsman from the group of 100.[43]

PLATE 6: Two panels. Left panel with Eucharistic chalice with cross cut into base, Tudor rose and grapevine. Right panel with scroll decoration, pomegranate and 'flaming' vase with split diamond decoration.

PLATE 7: Panel from high-quality group of ten, with single motif of perspectival vase.

Clifford Smith argues that the panels were by different, but contemporary, craftsmen,[44] while Rhona Huggins suggests that the ten might be later than the group of 100 (*c.*1540–60 and *c.*1526–33 respectively).[45] She does not explain the reasons for this dating, but it's possible that the narrow panels were taken from the Abbey and augmented with extra panels when installed in Abbey House. Another scenario, not previously suggested, is that the patron acquired the group of ten ready-made, perhaps from the continent, and commissioned the narrow panels from native carvers to complete a room. This may explain why Renaissance motifs on the group of ten appear in simplified and less accomplished form on the group of 100, but none of the heraldry features on the ten. The argument that the ten panels were by a Northern European or Italian craftsman is largely based on their skilled workmanship, perhaps a misleading assumption,[46] and though the differing levels of familiarity with imported and native devices may suggest artisans of different origins, such motifs could also travel independently, via print sources and other means.

Hands

In the group of 100 panels, different handling of recurring motifs may serve to identify different craftsmen. A 'flaming' vase flanked by scrolls appears multiple times: in some instances the vase is decorated with uneven rows of zigzags (Pl. 9) but elsewhere with regular, 'split' diamonds (Pl. 11). Similarly, grotesque fishes may have split-diamond scales (Pl. 3) or scales that resemble round roof shingles (Pl. 10). Although it might be assumed that the craftsman using split diamonds on vases would also use them on fish, and that this might therefore suggest a way to group panels by craftsman, the picture is complicated by a panel where the upper supporter is a fish with rounded scales and the lower supporter is a vase

PLATE 8: Panel from high-quality group of ten with single motif of portrait medallion.

PLATE 9: Panel with 'flaming' vase with zig-zag decoration, portcullis and antique urn..

PLATE 10: Panel with grotesque fish with curved 'roof-shingle' scales, male portrait head with sallet, and oak branch.

PLATE 11: Panel with grotesque fish with round scales, portrait medallion of woman facing left, and 'flaming' vase with split-diamond decoration.

PLATE 12: Panel with ogee arch with 'bobble' decoration, male head facing left wearing sallet, and antique urn.

with split-diamonds (Pl. 11). Rounded fish scales and split-diamond vase decoration are not mutually exclusive.

Another distinction between panels concerns the ogee arches—upper supporters on roughly a quarter of the surviving panels—panels which perhaps formed the top tier in their original setting. The arches usually have pendant vines—bunches of grapes, leaves or groups of three 'bobbles' or berries. On fifteen panels large 'bobbles', leaves or bunches of grapes appear to grow from behind the ogee arch, suspended on two stalks either side of the centre (Pl. 3). However, on eight panels the pendants are generally three small 'bobbles', and actually join the underside of the arch, around triangular hollows (Pl. 12). In this group the crockets above the arch tend to slope inwards, whereas in the former group the crockets are more upright.

In spite of these differences, most of the large group of panels are similar enough in size and treatment to suggest they were made at the same time and place. Although tentative suggestions can be made about the handling of certain forms, there are too few common motifs to estimate the total number of craftsmen. Potential groups can be suggested, although the idea that different craftsmen worked on different parts of the same panel complicates matters. One set of panels (*e.g.* Pl. 13) consistently uses a narrow range of Renaissance vase, scroll and ribbon motifs rarely found on other panels, and never features ogees. More symmetrical than other panels, they often show a greater facility in the carving especially in the portrait roundels. On the other hand, heraldic devices such as coats of arms and royal badges tend to appear on unsymmetrical panels, alongside a more varied repertoire of supporting motifs. One group of four panels (*e.g.* Pl. 4) is especially similar in terms of handling, and probably by one craftsman; carved in lower relief than other panels, the surfaces are covered in a riot of detail. The humorous motifs fill a large area, and the elaborate roundel borders and textured backgrounds give a busy overall impression.

Other Examples

No other work by the same craftsmen is known to survive, but carved decoration in what came to be known as the 'anticke' ('all'antica') or 'Romayne' (Roman) style experienced a burst of popularity in the first decades of the sixteenth century. Characterised by Renaissance motifs such as vases, scrolls, foliage and profile portraits in medallions, the 'all'antica' style became fashionable at court with high-profile works such as Giovanni da Maiano's terracotta portrait roundels at Hampton Court Palace and Pietro Torrigiano's Tomb for Henry VII at Westminster Abbey. England's relations with Italy, particularly Florence, deepened following Medici Pope Leo X's election in 1513, and foreigners were appointed to high-profile English positions.[47] Through a combination of immigration and trade, up-to-date objects and fashions entered England, for example through the Cavalcanti and Bardi company, who supplied not only the court, but also sold goods over the counter to the middle classes in their *Drapperia* (warehouse) in London.[48]

The 'all'antica' or 'romayne' style was disseminated at many social levels, but also in areas of the country remote from the court and London; a fact which must be due to the

influence of immigrants from Northern European countries, particularly France and the Low Countries, and the burgeoning print trade. The style is found in churches and secular settings, on fixtures and moveable furniture.[49] Medallion heads are carved on font covers at Radbourne in Derbyshire and Pilton, Devon; choir-stalls at Christchurch in Hampshire and the Salkeld Screen at Carlisle Cathedral (a late example of the fashion, *c.* 1540–1550).[50] The bold simplicity of the medallions at Waltham Abbey is comparable to West Country examples at Great Fulford in Devon and the Sandford Orleigh overmantle in Newton Abbot.[51] Yet many West Country profiles have the heads tilted upwards, as on the East Down chancel screen and Swimbridge Church font surround, both Devon,[52] whereas at Waltham Abbey the figures are relatively upright.

Although 'Romayne' panelling was popular across the country, comparison with other surviving panels shows that the combination of a portrait medallion in the same field as separate, traditional supporters is very rare. The closest 'local' example was at Boughton Malherbe in Kent, removed to America in 1923. Here, 'curved-rib' linenfold panels framed medallion profile panels in low relief; the medallion panels had supporting scrolls akin to the ten high-quality Waltham panels. Other relatively local examples, such as the panelling from Beckingham Hall, Essex, now in the V&A, tend to have medallions carved in deeper relief, or, as at Longstowe Hall in Cambridgeshire, combine portraits with delicate, low-relief arabesques and vases, similar to panels from the archiepiscopal palace at the Chateau de Gaillon, now at St Denis, Paris. If the panels originated in Waltham Abbey, the strong connections with royalty and aristocracy suggest the influence of courtly and ecclesiastical fashions.

ICONOGRAPHY

Without knowing the craftsmen's nationality, the panelling's iconography is the strongest evidence for its position at a collision point between native and continental influences. The still essentially medieval motifs of the English Gothic, such as ogee arches, combine with continental Renaissance iconography of portrait medallions and classical vases, demonstrating the struggle to adapt increasingly fashionable, foreign designs to English needs. Native craftsmen trained in the Gothic tradition came increasingly into contact with forms imported from abroad, entering the country not only as part of the exchange of goods, but also through the print trade, and via immigrant artisans from countries where, by the early sixteenth century, the Renaissance had taken root.

The foreigners were not universally popular, however, and the uneasy assimilation of imported forms at Waltham is echoed in the sometimes-problematic nature of immigration in the early sixteenth century. In 1517, not long before the panels were carved, the Evil May Day riots in London saw English artificers raiding the houses of immigrant craftsmen, protesting that they could 'scarce get any living' while 'the Duchemen bryng over Iron, Tymber, lether and Weynskot ready wrought, as Nayles, Lockes, Baskettes, Cubbordes, Stooles, Tables, Chestes, girdels, with pointes, saddles and painted clothes so that if it were wrought here, Englishemen might have some worke and lyvynge by it.'[53] By 1545 even the King, whose preference for foreign craftsmen was well-known, had had enough, as William Paget wrote to Lord Cobham: 'My lord, I beseech you send over no more strangers, and move the rest there to send none, for the King is not content'.[54] Though immigrants nevertheless continued to bring their trades to England and its regions, the country was reluctant to abandon its Gothic past for the Renaissance future. The Waltham combination of novel and native forms can be seen as an attempt to 'naturalise' the new style, assimilating it into the already-existing network of motifs and traditions in which any native craftsman would have been well-versed.

On the 100 narrow panels, a centrally-carved medallion is framed by two supporting devices. The majority of medallions displayed at EFDM have profile portraits in a variety of wreaths: of the eighty-six seen by the present author, twenty-nine men face right, seventeen face left; two women face right and twelve face left. On twenty-six of these panels, the medallion contains a heraldic device rather than a portrait: nine Tudor roses, nine pomegranates, four portcullises and four unidentified coats of arms. The same supporting designs frequently recur, but combinations are rarely repeated. Common motifs include 'fish' grotesques, in pairs or singly with full-frontal, human-like heads; vases with scrolls (Pls 9, 12); ogee arches with leaf or grapevine pendants, and paired grotesque heads in profile. Notable figures featured only once include: a green man (Pl. 15); a Eucharistic chalice (Pl. 6); a palisade fence in front of a vine (Pl. 17) and a cross (now missing its crossbar) on a three-step base, usually identified as the Waltham Holy Cross (Pl. 5).

Medallion Heads

The medallion profiles have their origins in the coins and medals of the ancient world and Renaissance, prized by Early

PLATE 13: High quality (Italianate?) panel with ribbon decoration, portrait medallion of woman facing left, and foliate vase.

PLATE 14: Panel from right of overmantel, now in store, possibly showing Tudor patron. Reproduced from Clifford Smith, H. 1924.

Modern collectors. Though portrait medallions originated in fifteenth-century Italy, English examples owe a special debt to German medals, which are 'distinctly different from their Italian counterparts,' usually made without inscriptions from stone or wooden models, with attention lavished on the individual's features.[55] Comparison of English medallion wall panels with wooden models for German medals reveals stylistic similarities, but further links can be made with Germanic costume, probably indicating that these forms were transmitted through Northern European prints or craftsmen. Many figures wear helmets with 'sallets' (Pl. 10), helmets pointed at the back to protect the neck in battle, popular in late fifteenth-century Germany but less so in England.[56] Other figures wear vaguely classicising headgear, a reference to the antique origins of the medallion format.

The generic nature of the portraits at Waltham resists Rhona Huggins' suggestion that they represent real individuals, as is the case elsewhere:[57] for example Haddon Hall, where dining room medallions may contain portraits of Sir George Vernon and his wife Margaret Talboys. One exception, however, may be the Waltham Abbey medallion formerly on the right

PLATE 15: Detail of panel with green man (upper supporter).

of the overmantel, now in store, depicting a young man in Tudor clothes, possibly the patron (Pl. 14).[58] The majority of the panels probably represent loosely classical or Christian characters, especially heroes and heroines of classical mythology, akin to the *uomini famosi* and *donne famose* (famous men and women) schemes then-popular across Europe. These groups of virtuous individuals served as moral exempla, deriving from works such as Plutarch's *Mulierum virtutes* and Boccaccio's *Famous Women*.[59] Sue Hedge has suggested that the vestry panelling now at Norwich Cathedral portrays two related themes, the Nine Worthies (famous men) and the Power of Women, but here the presence of labelled shields enables the specific identification of some figures.[60] The lack of identifying attributes at Waltham Abbey makes such identifications impossible, but both schemes demonstrate 'formulaic' and 'repetitious' characters in 'fossilized' costume, suggesting allusions to historical and literary traditions rather than real contemporaries.[61]

Royal Iconography

Several Tudor badges appear on the panelling. The implications of the Aragonese pomegranates (Pl. 6) for dating have been discussed above, and though the pomegranate is sometimes a generic Christian or fertility motif, its coincidence here with roundels occupied by Tudor badges suggests an allusion to Katherine, Henry VIII's first wife. Other royal symbols include the Beaufort portcullis (Pl. 9)—the badge of Henry VIII's paternal grandmother, Margaret Beaufort—and the Tudor rose (Pls 2, 6). The rose, carved sometimes with two rings of petals and sometimes with three, represents the end of the Wars of the Roses and Henry VII's marriage to Elizabeth of York, Henry VIII's parents, uniting the Lancastrian red rose and the white rose of York. The inclusion of Tudor heraldic badges demonstrates the contemporary interest in dynastic affairs, but the presence of royal symbols need not imply royal patronage, instead representing the owner's loyalty to the crown and the still-fledgling Tudor dynasty. The inclusion might, however, suggest a patron of some standing; if made for Waltham Abbey, they may have been seen by the King himself, who probably stayed there when visiting the royal hunting forest nearby.[62]

Supporters

The upper and lower 'supporters' on each panel are a curious mixture of Renaissance and Gothic motifs. Renaissance dolphins appear alongside grotesque fish; simplified '*all'antica*' vases, scrolls and trophies of arms (Pl. 5) mingle with ogee arches, vines, an oak branch (Pl. 10) and a green man (Pl. 15). The supporters, especially the grotesques, are humorous and enthusiastically carved, with little concern for symmetry. The naturalisation of foreign motifs and their inclusion alongside traditional English forms demonstrates the artisans' versatility and playfulness, applying Renaissance decoration to indigenous narrow-panel wainscoting, giving the imported forms a peculiarly English flavour.

Religious Iconography

The presence of religious iconography on the panelling may corroborate an origin in the abbey, or if for a secular house, the close proximity of a major pilgrimage centre.[63] Alongside numerous grapes and grapevines (Pls 3, 16), there are three explicitly religious motifs; a chalice with a cross carved into its base (Pl. 6), a Calvary cross on three steps, cross-bar now missing (Pl. 5), and a chalice on a shield between two eagles. One grotesque supporter has a tiny cross above its head. The grapes and chalices suggest Eucharistic connotations, but in one instance a vine grows from behind a palisade fence (Pl. 17). A similar motif was noted at Boughton Malherbe (1520s or later) by Henry Avray Tipping (Pl. 19), where he associated it with a vineyard.[64] The fact that such an unusual motif appears both in Kent and Essex suggests a common design source for both works, or perhaps that the carvers at one had knowledge of the other.

The cross motif has been associated with the Waltham Holy Cross. Discovered in Montacute, Somerset in the eleventh century, legend claims it was miraculously brought to Essex, where then-lord Tovi built a collegiate church of secular canons. After Tovi's death Edward the Confessor granted it to Harold Godwinson, who increased the church's endowments and was miraculously cured of paralysis by the Holy Cross.[65] The identification of the carving as the Waltham Holy Cross derives from the Great Seal of the abbey, the obverse of which shows a cross on a mound supported by two angels (a wax impression is displayed in an upstairs gallery at EFDM).[66] The absence of angels on the Waltham Abbey panelling may suggest that the Holy Cross is not intended; however, in 'The Seales of the Armes of All the Mitred Abbeys in England' in Fuller's *History of the Church of England,* 1665, the image of the Holy Cross is reproduced slightly differently, still with two angels, but smaller and on a base of several steps.[67] A similar version, presumably derived from Fuller's, appears in Farmer's 1735 *History of Waltham Abbey*, this time on three steps, as in the carving.[68] If the panel represents the Holy Cross, the

PLATE 16: Detail of panel with grape vine (lower supporter).

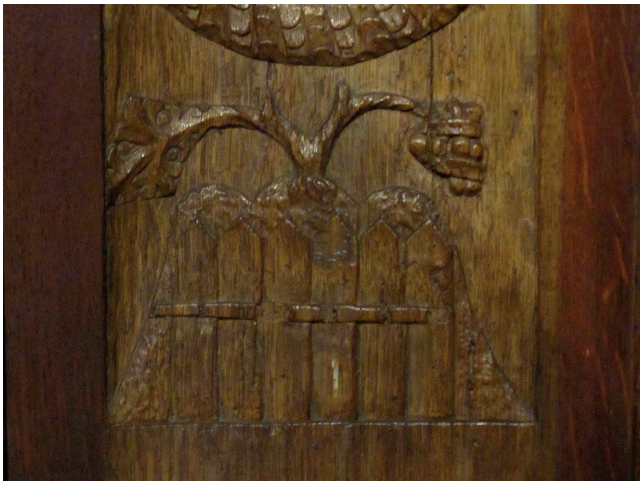

PLATE 17: Detail of panel showing grapevine growing behind palisade fence.

PLATE 18: Detail of panel with full-face grotesque, possibly caricature of Henry VIII (upper supporter).

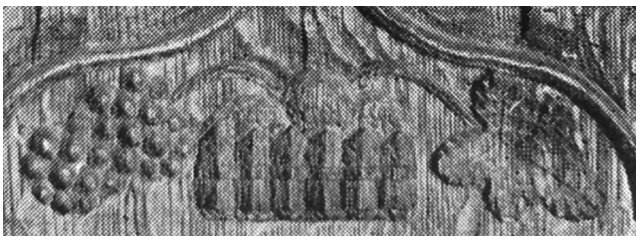

PLATE 19: Detail of curved rib linenfold panel with grapevine and palisade fence motif, from Boughton Malherbe. Reproduced from Avray-Tipping, H. 1924, 221.

panelling must have originated in the town of Waltham Holy Cross, either in Waltham Abbey itself or a nearby house.

CONCLUSION

This essay has reassessed the Waltham Abbey panelling, positioning it for the first time in its social, historical and cultural contexts. Created probably in the 1520s, when Renaissance designs were beginning to be appreciated in England, its iconography and style demonstrate the creative marriage of foreign and native forms. The eclectic mixture of medievalising ogee arches, English royal heraldry and continental profile medallions is mirrored in the varied approaches to, and quality of, carving. The plurality of motifs and skill levels suggests accomplished, perhaps northern European, craftsmen working on the group of narrow panels, alongside less-skilled carvers more familiar with native forms, while another highly-skilled artisan, possibly foreign, may have been responsible for the group of ten squarer panels. This essay has suggested that the group of ten may have been acquired or imported ready-made by the patron, and augmented with additional panels made locally, explaining the Tudor and other native motifs on the larger group of 100 panels.

The question of the panelling's origins remains open. The panels were probably not made for Sir Anthony Denny. The arms are not his, and the Dennys only arrived in Waltham Abbey from the 1540s, after the 1533 divorce, meaning their patronage is ruled out by the religious motifs, pomegranates and narrow panel dimensions. The most plausible suggestion is that it was made for an Abbot of Waltham Abbey, supported by the existence of similar panelling belonging to the Abbots of Thame and Norwich. In this case, the heraldry on the panels need not refer to the abbot himself, but could belong to a donor, who—given Waltham Abbey's prestige—may not have been local. It also remains possible that the panels were made for Sir Humphrey Browne at Dallance, or for another nearby house so far unidentified.

Waltham Abbey Panelled Room was created during the heyday of early Anglo-Italian Renaissance ornament. Recent research has shown that the subsequent Reformation did not end England's contact with the continent. Although the latter part of the century saw a reassertion of the native chivalric and 'Neo-Medieval' decoration, represented here in the supporting devices, nevertheless European styles and craftsmen continued to influence England's art and architecture throughout the sixteenth century. Yet the year 1533, when Henry VIII divorced Katherine of Aragon, did mark the beginning of the end for this particular version of the early Italian Renaissance in England. When 'all'antica' or 'Romayne' work appeared later in the century it was more in the way of Netherlandish strapwork and grotesques than Renaissance profile medallions. If tradition is to be believed and the first discussions of divorce occurred in the Romeland of Waltham Abbey, then the Panelled Room may have served as a backdrop for events which altered the English religious, political, and artistic landscapes forever.

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ENDNOTES

1 St John's College, Cambridge.
2 Before 2016, ninety-one of the panels were on display at Epping Forest District Museum. The author's photographs of all these panels are online at <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.9113>.
3 Clifford Smith 1924; since then, Huggins, R. 1984, unpublished study in Waltham Abbey Panelled Room object file, FTF 2011–1899, V&A; Huggins, P.J. 2013, A7–9.
4 Addison 1945, 10–11; Green 1982, 24–5.
5 The house in Green Yard burnt down shortly after the panelling was removed, making it hard to draw definite conclusions about its age and status. Waltham Abbey Panelled Room, object file, FTF 2011–1899, V&A.
6 Waltham Abbey Panelled Room, object file, FTF 2011–1899, V&A.
7 Chinnery 1986, 421.
8 See *e.g.* Sicca and Waldman (eds) 2012; Riall 2008; Hedge 2012; Barnes 2013.
9 Littler 1863, *Essex Archaeol. Trans.,* 2, Plate III, facing 49.
10 Cutting from unknown newspaper of 10 April 1770 reads: 'Yesterday the Workmen began to pull down that antient [sic] Edifice called Waltham-Abbey...', referring to Abbey House, as the Abbey itself was long gone. WAHS, File FF11; I am grateful to Mary Salton for sending me a copy.
11 Biddell, G. 1920, unpublished study in Waltham Abbey Panelled Room object file, FTF 2011–1899, V&A.
12 TNA E 117/11/24, fol 13–14.
13 As, for example, 1522: 'A brode cheste of wayneskott.' in Tymms 1850, quoted in 'Wainscot, n.' Meaning 1a, OED Online. The origins of the word 'wainscot' are unclear; possibly a corruption from Dutch *wagenschot,* it may relate to a wagon shaft, implying the wood's strength and straightness. It might also relate to the Flemish or Dutch, *wandschot*, 'wand' meaning wall. Chinnery 1986, 155; 'Wainscot, n.', Etymology, OED Online: Available: <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/225115?rskey=6R93Hm&result=1#eid> (accessed 23 Dec 2013).
14 TNA E 117/11/24, fol. 13r.
15 Farmer 1735, 160.
16 Huggins, R. 1984, unpublished.
17 Illustrated in Avray-Tipping 1924, 256–257.
18 Avray-Tipping 1924, 340–350; xlvi–xlix; 217–223.
19 Jourdain 1924, fig. 3 and p.40.
20 Page and Round (eds) 1907. Anthony died in 1549, in 1552 his widow Joan Campernowne bought the abbey buildings; their son Henry inherited the estate in 1553 and died 1574, when it passed to his son Edward; Clifford Smith 1924, 8–9.
21 Fuller, in Nichols 1828, 104–105 n. 3.
22 Huggins, R. 1984, unpublished.

23 *Country Life,* 17 July 1909, 'Thame Park, Oxfordshire', 26/654, 90–8.
24 Hedge 2012, 320–321.
25 Coss and Keen (eds) 2008, 8.
26 Ibid., 9, 83–104.
27 Given as 'Dennys, 1 and 4, Argent, a chevron sable between three mullets gules; 2 and 3, Argent, a lion rampant azure, crowned or' in *A Late Tudor Book of Arms*, Harleian MS 6163; Cooke and Foster, 1904; Denny 1910, 245-6. Sir Antony's arms were gules a saltire argent between twelve crosses formy or; Clifford Smith 1924, 17–18.
28 Denny 1910, 245–6.
29 The lion at Waltham is not 'crowned', and no sinister bend is mentioned—a prominent feature of the carving
30 Chinnery 1986, 421.
31 Biddell, 1920, unpublished. Huggins, P.J. 2013, suggests a link with an illegitimate son of Sir Anthony Denny in Suffolk, A7–8; however, even if Denny's illegitimate son were associated with the Suffolk Denny arms, it seems unlikely that Sir Anthony Denny, a prominent courtier with his own arms, would use his illegitimate son's on panelling.
32 Clifford Smith 1924, 18.
33 VCH 1966, 151–162: available: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42718> (accessed 26 Dec 2013) Presumably Sir Humphrey Browne of Terling, Essex, b. 1480, d. 1562, who married Anne Vere, 1507, and Anne Hussey, 1530 <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~hwbradley/aqwg2936.htm#77879> (accessed 26 Dec 2013).
34 In stained glass in the hall of Middle Temple, London, the blazon is quarterly: 1, 4 Gules, a chevron between three lions' paws erased argent all within a bordure of the last, a crescent for cadency; 2, 3 counter-quartered Charleton and Frances; Baker, pers. Comm.
35 Huggins, R. 1984, unpublished study in Waltham Abbey Panelled Room object file, FTF 2011–1899, V&A. Other suggestions have included that the panels were made for a John Broughton at Green Yard (Biddell 1920, unpublished) and a family called Blackett (Cescinsky and Gribble 1922, 256–263), but there is no evidence whatsoever that these people were connected with the abbey or the town.
36 Huggins, R. 1984, unpublished.
37 A Calvary cross on a mound held by two angels (derived from the Abbey's Great Seal) and on a cross engrailed, five crosses crosslet fitchy, Fuller 1655; *cf.* Dorling 1936, 114–132.
38 Page and Round (eds) 1907, n. 122–5.
39 Clifford Smith 1924.
40 Jourdain 1924, 22; Harrison also carved the stalls at Christ's College in 1510; Lee 2005, 193.
41 Clifford Smith 1924, 14.
42 Hind 1938–48, E.III.48, pl 436, British Museum Object No. 1845,0825.384; Jourdain 1924, fig 17, pl 27, British Museum Object No. 1845,0809.1000. For use of prints as design sources in general, see Wells-Cole, 1997.
43 Clifford Smith 1924, 14–15.
44 Ibid.
45 Huggins, R. 1984, unpublished.
46 Clifford Smith 1924, 14–15.
47 *E.g.* Cardinal Giulio de' Medici became Bishop of Worcester in 1521–22. Gunn 2012, 24.
48 Sicca and Waldman 2012, 10.
49 See eg Jourdain 1924, fig. 276; pl. 201, fig. 271, pl. 198; fig. 269, pl. 197.
50 Barnes 2013.
51 Reference from Nicholas Riall, pers. comm.
52 Ibid.
53 Hall 1904, 156, quoted in Jourdain 1924, 21.
54 Carden, R. W. 1912, 203.
55 S K Scher (ed.) 1994, 24. *E.g.* V&A Museum No. 180–1867.
56 Hedge 2012, 321; Kelly and Schwabe 2002, 70–71
57 Huggins, R. 1984, unpublished.
58 Clifford Smith 1924, 16.
59 Franklin 2006, esp. 13–21.
60 Hedge 2012, 326–7.
61 Hedge 2012, 321–323.
62 Sears 2000, 9; one room in the inventory is called 'The kinges chambor', TNA E 117/11/24, fol 14r.
63 Clifford Smith 1924, 22.
64 Avray-Tipping 1924, 220.
65 Page and Round (eds) 1907, 166; Fuller 1655, 6; Pevsner 1976, 400.
66 See Page and Round 1907, Pl. III.
67 Fuller 1655; the arms of Waltham Abbey are also given as: on a cross engrailed, five crosses crosslet fitchy. *Cf.* Dorling 1936.
68 Farmer 1735 pl. facing p. 146.

ABBREVIATIONS

BM	British Museum
EFDM	Epping Forest District Museum
FTF	Object Files, Furniture Textiles and Fashion Archive, V&A
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
TNA	The National Archives
V&A	Victoria and Albert Museum
VCH	Victoria County History
WAHS	Waltham Abbey Historical Society

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